Moderate 5.0 earthquake shakes Ontario, Quebec, and U.S.

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James Morton

City Centre North York was one of many buildings evacuated briefly when a moderate quake shook Ontario on Wednesday.

A moderate earthquake was felt in parts of Southern Ontario and as far as Ottawa and Montreal. The U.S. Geological Survey has reported that an earthquake measuring 5.0 struck Southern Ontario, Quebec and a large part of the Eastern U.S. at around 1:40 p.m. ET. According to the USGS the quake was centered around 49 km from Cumberland, Ont. The quake was initially listed at a 5.5 but downgraded a few hours later.

According to officials from Toronto there have been no reports on injuries or damage related to the tremors. In Ottawa, the closest city to the quake, there were no reports of damage but workers were asked to leave their offices briefly.

Staff members at the *National Post* building in Don Mills in Northeast Toronto felt shaking. Reports were coming in of shaking all across the city on Twitter and from a number of media sources. Many buildings around Toronto were asked to evacuate.

Buckingham, Quebec resident Jean-Paul Robitaille, 82, was running a few errands when he felt the tremors.

“At the store, the paint on the shelves fell off and opened up. So it’s a mess,” said Mr. Robitaille from his home. “There were about 10 people in the store and they ran out.” Mr. Robitaille said he did not notice any damage to his own home.

A few kilometres north at the Buckingham Golf Club, Guillaume Thibodeau said the green seemed to be intact.

“No trees fell, but inside there was a lot of shaking,” he said. “I was outside so it wasn’t too bad.”

Karine Majeu, spokesperson for the City of Gatineau, said there have not received any news of major damage. A final report is pending.

Despite reports of broken windows, Ottawa’s Rideau Centre, a downtown mall, was shaken but unscathed by the earthquake, said Cindy VanBuskirk, the centre’s general manager.

“There has been absolutely no damage whatsoever,” she said. “There was no interruption to our operations.”

One section of Highway 307, near Bowman, Que., became impassable because of a landslide and several buildings in Gracefield, Que., including a heritage church, restaurant and hotel, suffered significant damage.

Ottawa resident Vince Charron was driving to his cottage at Blue Sea Lake, near Gracefield, and stopped to take pictures of the restaurant, which suffered a partially-collapsed chimney.

“People were outside with their drinks in their hands: they looked in shock,” he said. “They were pretty shaken up.”

Ms. VanBuskirk said she was in her office at the time, felt the shake and “thought there must be an extra-large bus going by.” When the rumbling kept going for several seconds, she realized it was something else.

Officials with Ottawa’s light rail O-Train service say the service has been suspended until further notice while the tracks are inspected.

Canwest News Service

No, this is not one big coffee break. Workers in Ottawa leave their desks after a quake rattled the city.

In a release, the City of Toronto said its officials are looking for signs of quake damage.

“In our initial assessment, there has been no major damage to City infrastructure,” it said in the release. “The City has received no calls concerning bridge, building or other infrastructure problems.”

TTC commissioner Adam Giambrone reassured people that subway tunnels were safe. “TTC engineering is on top of the small earthquake & TTC tunnels are secure & built to withstand earthquakes. It is safe,” he wrote on Twitter. Ottawa’s O-train was forced to suspend service until workers could inspect the tracks, officials said.

Toronto’s Emergency Medical Services has received no requests for help related to the earthquake , said Kim McKinnon, a spokeswoman for the service.

“Thankfully, we have not heard anything, nothing immediate,” said Ms. McKinnon. “(But) we’re watching everything very, very carefully.”

Tyler Anderson/National Post - Office workers in the Financial District after the quake on Wednesday afternoon.

The earthquake adds to EMS concerns at a time when it is readying for the G20 summit and the expected protests and possible violence around it, but she said the agency is well able to handle the situations. G20 organizers said the quake had no damage on the security fence or the perimeter.

The earthquake that was felt across Eastern Canada and the Eastern United States was likely caused by a geological phenomenon called “isostatic rebound,” said University of Toronto geologist Russell Pysklywec.

Most of North America was buried two kilometres of ice 10,000 years ago, he explained. Since then the earth has been slowly rebounding back to its pre-ice age levels.

He said it was like a steel plate on a piece of Styrofoam and as the plate is lifted the foam begins to reform — but not right away.

The Ottawa Valley is particularly vulnerable because of a major fault that runs through the area.

“The Ottawa River is essentially a huge fault. When tremors begin deep in the earth, about 20 km down, it looks for a place to focus that energy, and a fault is the best place for that to happen.”

He said the tremors will have been recorded all around the world because the amount of energy is so huge that it can travel half way around the globe in 20 seconds.

When Prof. Pysklywec first heard the rumbling he at first thought it was his daughter playing the music too loud.

“I was about to get mad at her and until I realized it was an earthquake.”

Torontoist - Workers at Yonge and Eglinton wait to be allowed back into their building after a moderate earthquake.

Reporters in the *Post’s* Ottawa offices felt the shaking about 30 seconds before it was felt in Toronto.

“The office started to sway and shake while I was talking on the phone to editor Rob Roberts. The fact we’re three floors above the Israeli embassy in an Ottawa office tower makes any sudden rocking and rolling a cause for extreme apprehension. Thus, hearing no explosion and seeing no fire was a cause for relief,” said political columnist Don Martin.

“I’ve felt mild quakes in the past, but nothing like this one. For a good 20 seconds after the initial jolt, there was a slight rolling and vibrating sensation. A picture fell off the shelf and a stack of business cards

fell over. Roberts couldn't believe what I was saying at first and then it hit Toronto. I needed to convince him no longer," he said.

Cathy Basile, who was at her home in south Ottawa, said she felt the tremors at about 1:45 p.m.

> "Everything started slowly to shake, and then it got really strong, like a train going through. And then it slowed down, stopped, and then there was a little burp. My friend who works for the civil service downtown says everyone went outside their building, they're all on the street.''

Alain Latour in Toronto and his wife were having an afternoon coffee when they felt the quake:

> "My wife and I were having espresso and chocolate in our balcony on Bathurst and St. Clair W. when the balcony shook. It's a hundred-year-old, third-storey wooden balcony, so at first we thought maybe someone had hit one of the balconies below. We jumped up and leaned against the railing and, looking down, found nothing unusual. "It must've been an earthquake!" my wife said. I laughed. "Of course it wasn't."

According to reports on Twitter, people as far east as Boston, as far west as Windsor and as far south as Cleveland felt the tremors. According to the Richter scale an earthquake of a 5.0 magnitude is considered moderate and could cause damage to poorly constructed buildings. They are relatively common and some 800 happen around the world annually.

Some of the major cities that felt the June 23rd earthquake

View Larger Map

Ontario quake takes over Twitter

Twitter users flooded the service with tweets about the earthquake and it became one of the most popular topics. The map below shows what people are talking about in a geographical area. Click for an interactive version.

Posted in: Canada, News, Posted Toronto Tags: Earthquake, Toronto